

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method of providing a value stamp over a communication
2 network, comprising:
3 providing a medium to a user having access to a data processing system,
4 the medium being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon and having an identifier
5 code that identifies the medium;
6 receiving from the user the identifier code of the medium to be used to
7 purchase a value stamp; and
8 using the identifier code to decide whether or not to perform an action.

1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 printing the value indicium on the medium to generate a value stamp.

1 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the medium is a postage label
2 sheet having a plurality of labels.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein a plurality of value indicia are
2 printed on the plurality of labels to generate a plurality of value stamps.

1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the action includes determining
2 whether an affiliate of a service provider requires an additional supply of the medium by
3 examining the identifier code, wherein the affiliate is the user or a provider of the medium
4 to the user, and wherein the service provider is an agent authorized to provide the value
5 stamp to the user.

1 6. The method of claim 5, the method further comprising:
2 generating customer-relation-management (CRM) information at least for
3 the identifier code of the medium;
4 storing the generated CRM information in a database system, wherein the
5 database system includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media; and
6 retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the identifier code
7 received from the user, wherein the retrieved CRM information is used to determine
8 whether the affiliate requires the additional supply of the medium.

1 7. The method of claim 5, wherein the value indicium is a postage
2 indicium.

1 8. The method of claim 5, wherein the identifier code is a label serial
2 number or a sheet serial number and is used to authenticate the medium.

1 9. The method of claim 5, wherein the identifier code enables one
2 group of media to be differentiated from another group.

1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein using the identifier code involves
2 determining whether or not the action is required on the fly by examining the identifier
3 code.

1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the action includes determining
2 whether or not to allow the user to use the medium to purchase a value stamp over the
3 network.

1 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:
2 determining whether or not the medium has been previously purchased;
3 and
4 if not purchased previously, requiring the user to purchase the medium or
5 commit to purchasing a medium before allowing the user to use the medium to purchase
6 the value stamp over the network.

1 13. A method of providing a value stamp over a communication
2 network, comprising:
3 generating customer-relation-management (CRM) information
4 corresponding to an identifier code of a medium to be distributed to a user, the medium
5 being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon to produce a value stamp, the
6 identifier code being suitable for distinguishing the medium from at least one other
7 medium;
8 storing the generated CRM information in a database system, wherein the
9 database system includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media;
10 providing the medium to a user having access to a data processing system;

09708975-440700

11 receiving from the user over the network the identifier code of the medium
12 to be used to purchase a value stamp; and
13 retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the identifier code.

1 14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:
2 determining whether an affiliate of a service provider requires an
3 additional supply of the medium upon examining the identifier code, wherein the affiliate
4 is the user or a provider of the medium to the user, and wherein the service provider is an
5 agent authorized to provide the value stamp to the user.

1 15. The method of claim 13, further comprising:
2 determining whether or not the medium has been previously purchased;
3 and
4 if not purchased previously, requiring the user to purchase the medium
5 before allowing the user to use the medium to purchase the value stamp over the network.

1 16. The method of claim 13, wherein the identifier code is additionally
2 used as a security feature of the medium to authenticate the medium.

1 17. A method of providing a postage medium to a user for use in
2 purchasing a value stamp over a communication network, the method comprising:
3 generating customer-relation-management (CRM) information
4 corresponding to a serial number of a medium to be distributed to a user, the medium
5 being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon, the serial number uniquely
6 identifying the medium;
7 storing the generated CRM information in a database system, wherein the
8 database system includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media;
9 providing the medium to a user having access to a data processing system;
10 receiving from the user over the network the serial number of the medium
11 to be used to purchase a postage stamp;
12 retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the serial number; and
13 determining whether an affiliate of a postage service provider requires an
14 additional supply of the medium upon examining the serial number, wherein the affiliate
15 is the user or a provider of postage medium to the user, and wherein the service provider
16 is an agent authorized to provide the postage stamp to the user.